SCAR-LAB Report of Investigations 88-3:

An Archaeological Survey of a Proposed Borrow Area Near the Chemical Processing Plant on the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory

Submitted to

E.G.&G. Idaho, Inc.
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by

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Introduction

On May 17, 1988, archaeologists J.W. Ross and S.E. Wright from the Swanson/Crabtree Anthropology Research Laboratory (SCAR-LAB) at Idaho State University, and E.G.&G. employee C.D. Marler conducted an archaeological survey of a proposed borrow area near the Chemical Processing Plant (CPP) on Idaho National Engineering Laboratory (INEL) property in Butte County, Idaho. The project area consists of approximately 9.3 hectares (2.3 acres) located east of the railroad tracks in the SE 1/4 of Section 18, and the NE 1/4 of Section 19, T3N R30E (Figure 1). The purpose of the survey was to insure that no significant cultural resources will be adversely affected by the planned borrowing activities.

This report provides documentation of the archaeological survey in accordance with USDI/BLM Cultural Resources Permit No. I-22683.

Literature and Site Records Review

The cultural resource records of the Southeast Idaho Archaeological Curation Center reveal no previously recorded sites for the project area. A search of the pertinent literature indicates that prior to the work reported here, no archaeological investigations had taken place within the boundaries of the proposed borrow area, although several surveys have been conducted in the vicinity of CPP resulting in the identification of several potentially significant sites (see especially Reed 1986, and Ross et all, 1986).

Survey Area

The project is located on the Big Lost River alluvial plain, approximately 300 m south of the present river channel, and 800 m northeast of the CPP facility. The northwest corner of the area is situated at the intersection of dirt road T-15 and the railway that connects the Central Facilities area with the Naval Reactor Facility. The boundaries of the tract - which measures 305 m (1000 ft.) on each side - were marked with wooden stakes by a D.O.E. survey crew prior to our arrival. A large section along the northwest edge of the area has been extensively disturbed by earlier borrow pit excavations.

Topographically the area is characterized by nearly level terrain at an elevation of approximately 1495 m (4905 ft.) a.s.l. The soil is composed of aeolian and alluvially deposited silts intermixed with dense deposits of alluvial gravels. A xeric plant community composed primarily of sagebrush, rabbitbrush, cheatgrass and prickly pear cactus provides ground cover in the area.

Survey Procedures

Standard SCAR-LAB field reconnaissance techniques were employed in the course of this project. The survey tactics involved a series of pedestrian transects with crew members walking abreast at 15 m intervals from one boundary of the project area to the other until the entire area had been examined. Particular attention was paid to areas that offered a glimpse of subsurface geological deposits (e.g. the walls and floors of the old borrow pits).

Survey Results

A single cultural resource, consisting of an isolated prehistoric retouched flake, was discovered in the course of the survey. This find, designated 10-BT-1442, was located approximately 350 m southeast of the junction of dirt road T-15 and the railroad tracks, and 120 m north of the southeast corner of the survey area (see Figure 1). The implement is small - approximately 3 cm long by 2.5 cm wide by .5 cm thick, and exhibits intentional retouch along the distal margin of the dorsal surface and the dexter margin of the ventral surface. It is interpreted as an informal, utilitarian tool suitable for a variety of scraping and cutting tasks. It was not collected.

As is the case with most isolated artifacts, 10-BT-1442 is not considered archaeologically significant in and of itself. The primary value of such resources resides in the information they provide about human use of particular areas - both in terms of intensity and function. As a result, the locational and descriptive data gathered in the process of recording isolated artifacts is usually sufficient to mitigate the affects of ground-disturbing activities.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the surface survey, archaeological clearance is recommended for the proposed borrow pit expansion. It is important to note, however, that the geology of the general area - in particular the nature of the depositional environment - increases the possibility that cultural or paleontological remains are buried within the alluvial deposits beneath the

modern ground surface. If subsurface cultural or paleontological materials are encountered during the course of the project, all land-disturbing activities should cease until a qualified archaeologist or paleontologist is consulted.

References Cited

Reed, W.G.
1986 An Archaeological Survey of the Idaho Chemical Processing Plant Perimeter. SCAR-LAB Reports of Investigations 86-2.

Ross, J.W., B.L. Ringe and W.G. Reed
1986 Archaeological Surveys of Three INEL Gravel Pit Locations. SCAR-LAB Reports of Investigations 86-6.